

SYMBOLIC SELF-PORTRAITS

Performance Task and Assessment – Grade 8

Task description:

Students will explore symbolism and its various interpretations through discussion, collaborative analysis, and writing about famous works of art as well as their own artwork. Students will create a mixed media self-portrait using symbolism to depict personal and/or cultural meaning.

Enduring Understandings:

1. Throughout history, portraiture has been used for self-expression.
2. Throughout time, artists have used a variety of media, design elements and principles, and personal and cultural symbolism in their portraits.
3. Effective portraits often reveal insights into the external context and interior condition of the subject.

Essential Questions:

1. Why do artists create self-portraits?
2. How do artists use media, design elements and principles, and their own personal styles to incorporate personal and/or cultural symbolism in their self-portraits?
3. How does a self- portrait communicate insights about the artist?

Content Standards:

Connecticut Visual Art Content Standard #1: Students will understand, select and apply media, techniques and processes.

Connecticut Visual Art Content Standard #2: Students will understand and apply elements and organizational principles of art.

Connecticut Visual Art Content Standard #3: Students will consider, select, and apply a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas.

Connecticut Visual Art Content Standard #4: Students will understand the visual arts in relation to history and culture.

Connecticut Visual Art Content Standard #5: Students will reflect upon, describe, analyze, interpret and evaluate their own and others' work.

Objectives:

1. Students will compare, contrast and reflect upon works of art, identifying media, design elements and principles, historic/cultural content, symbolic meaning, and expressive qualities.
2. Students will create a mixed-media self-portrait demonstrating use of accurate human facial proportions and application of the elements of color, line, shape, and value within their composition.
3. Students will demonstrate application of the principles of variety, repetition, and unity in their work.
4. Students will incorporate personal and/or cultural symbols that enrich or support the communication of their ideas.
5. Students will write a reflection piece explaining their process, their use of elements and principles, and the relationship of their artwork to the historical reference prints used in class.

Resources:

Materials: 9"x12" toned charcoal/pastel paper (tan or gray), 6" x 6" toned paper, colored pencils, graphite pencils (2-6B), white colored pencils, tortillons, erasers, mirrors

Biographical Information Sheets

Frida Kahlo – *Women Artists – Take 5 Series*, Crystal Productions

Judith Leyster – *Women Artists – Take 5 Series*, Crystal Productions

Jacob Lawrence – *Interdisciplinary Connections: Art and Social Studies – Take 5 Series*, Crystal Productions

Selected Prints

Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird* (same as biographical sheet);

Judith Leyster, *Self-Portrait* (same as biographical sheet);

Jacob Lawrence, *Self-Portrait (in studio)*, www.whitney.org/jacoblawrence/art/self_portrait.html

Student Handouts/Resources

- A. Handout/ Elements of Art Vocabulary
- B. Handout/ Principles of Design Vocabulary
- C. Handout/10 Color Schemes
- D. Handout/ Prospective Questions for Introduction- Kahlo
- E. Written Art Criticism handout of Frida Kahlo's *Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird*
- F. Compare and Contrast Worksheet (Venn) using Leyster and Lawrence self-portraits
- G. Written Compare/ Contrast Critique of Leyster and Lawrence self-portraits
- H. Self-Portrait Planning Sheets
- I. Formative Rubric / Preliminary Planning
- J. Human Facial Proportions-Checklist
- K. Symbolic Self-Portrait: Student Reflection
- L. Summative Rubric / Final Student Artwork & Final Reflections

Prior Learning Required

Students should understand and/or have developed skills/techniques in:

- Required media (see Materials list)
- Observational drawing (portrait)
- Three-dimensional rendering of form
- All elements and principles of design
- Description, analysis, and interpretation of artwork using art vocabulary (see Handouts A & B)

Learning Plan: (Based on 40-45 minute classes)**Day 1**

Teacher tells students they are beginning a unit during which they will analyze and then create their own self-portrait, incorporating personal symbols. Teacher should define the word **symbol** as an image or form that stands for or suggests a quality or idea (www.artlex.com). Today's activities will provide preparation for this unit.

Teacher reviews art vocabulary – including elements and principles of design (Handout A and B) and color terminology (Handout C) – with students to prepare them for discussion of a selected work of art. (Terms and vocabulary could be posted in classroom for reference).

Teacher leads discussion on the selected work of art, Frida Kahlo's *Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird*, referring to the Frida Kahlo Biographical Information Sheet as necessary.

- Using the Handout on Prospective Questions for Introduction (Handout D), the teacher guides the students through the processes of: description, analysis, interpretation and judgment.
- Focus discussion on the artist's use of symbolism to show personal and cultural meaning, and the use of color and value to support expressive quality.
- Also discuss Kahlo's use of line, shape, proportion, variety, repetition and unity.

Day 2

Teacher distributes Handout E: Written Art Criticism of *Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird by Frida Kahlo*. Students read and then discuss commonalities and differences in the class discussion and in the written criticism.

Teacher then presents Jacob Lawrence's *Self-Portrait (in studio)* and Judith Leyster's *Self-Portrait*. Students will complete a Venn diagram (Handout F) comparing and contrasting the works.

After students complete their Venn diagrams, the teacher distributes a completed model compare/contrast on the two works (Handout G). The teacher uses this as a closure activity to compare information students gathered in their discussion with the written sample. (This also serves as a model for students of incorporating writing in art.)

Day 3

Teacher presents the project, Symbolic Self-Portrait, to the students, providing an overview of the unit objectives. Students review the dimensions of the final summative rubric (Handout L). Then, using the rubric, students discuss at least two examples of student benchmarked artwork.

Teacher leads a brainstorming session to generate ideas, creating a list of students' suggestions for possible personal and cultural symbols. Teacher should again reinforce the definition of symbol. Teacher introduces the Self-Portrait Planning Sheets (Handout H). Students will then begin to complete the Self-Portrait Planning Sheets.

Optional: In order to help students with their background designs (Planning Sheets Handout H), teacher may model by doing a demonstration of overlapping, or may ask students to cut out their personal symbols so they can experiment with different overlapping configurations.

Optional: To help students with their color selection (Handout H), teachers may give students information on the symbolism of color. [* insert Teacher Resource on Color here *]

Day 4

Option 1 (preferred): Teacher hands out 6" x 6" toned drawing paper (or scrap size) and pencils, 6B pencils, white pencils, erasers, and tortillons. Students complete a value scale showing (5) distinct values on toned paper. Students then draw and render examples of facial features in planning packet (Handout H), using five (5) values including white highlights to create the illusion of 3-D.

Option 2 (if toned paper not available): Teacher has students complete value scale and values studies of facial features on white paper in planning packet (Handout H).

Students and teacher complete the Formative Rubric (Handout I).

Day 5

Teacher leads a demonstration using the Human Facial Proportions Checklist (Handout J) to develop self-portrait sketches. Proportions for shoulders will be included as well.

Using pencil, students draw themselves reflected in mirrors and use highlights and shadows to create form. These light structural drawings will be done on 9"x12" toned paper (preferred) or white paper. The minimum size for the head should be the size of the student's fist.

Before students begin their drawings on 9"x12" paper, they should refer back to their thumbnail sketches in Self-Portrait Planning Sheets (Handout H) to make sure they place their portrait on the background in their desired location.

Days 6 – 7

Students continue to refine their self-portrait drawings, adding specific expressive qualities (if desired) to enhance their piece. They should continue to refer to the Human Facial Proportions Checklist (Handout J).

Students begin to render their portraits, using a range of at least four (4) pencil values including highlights. (When using toned paper, white pencil should be used to create highlights).

Days 8 - 9

Students select a background design, from the thumbnail sketches they created in their Self-Portrait Planning Sheets (Handout H), which integrates their symbols with lines, shapes and colors.

Students transfer their selected background design to the 9"x12" paper on which they have already drawn and rendered their self-portrait.

Students render the background design using colored pencil to enhance their designs, keeping in mind ideas from their Self-Portrait Planning Sheets (Handout H).

Day 10

Students look at the nearly finished artwork and evaluate the use of color in the background.

Students select one color from the background to use as an accent on the portrait (face & shoulder area) somewhere to help integrate the background with the portrait. The color application should be *minimal* and used to enhance the unity of the black and white portrait and the colored background.

Day 11

Teachers post artwork exemplars studied in class (i.e. Kahlo, Leyster, Lawrence) while students complete their reflection questions (Handout K).

Students reflect on their self-portraits and complete the Symbolic Self-Portrait Student Reflection Sheet (Handout K). They describe their choices regarding: personal symbolism, use of elements and principles of design, and their process from initial ideas through refinement to completion of the final piece. Finally, they comment on how their self-portraits were influenced by the selected master artworks referred to in class.

Day 12

Students score their own artwork using the Summative Rubric for Final Student Artwork (Handout L).

Teacher scores all artwork and final reflections using the Summative Rubrics for Final Student Artwork and Final Reflections (Handout L).